

## Nisqually Earthquake

# DSHS all shook up — The day the earth moved

**W**hen the 6.8 magnitude Nisqually Earthquake hit at 10:54 a.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 28, DSHS staff throughout the Puget Sound area were tested, as individuals, as co-workers, as state employees. While the shake was felt throughout much of the state, its power to disturb was not evenly distributed. Headquarters staff on the fourth floor of Office Building 2 had a much different experience than those in a meeting in the Tacoma Centennial building (worse).

But while each of us experienced the earthquake differently, both physically and emotionally, the stories abound of how, when faced with the earth beneath us being undependable, DSHS employees were dependable. They were there for their fellow employees and they were there for the clients.

Their stories were sometimes even the stuff of heroism. More often, they were just small everyday examples of courage and teamwork - occasionally funny, and always flavored by human faith and comradeship that surmounted the crisis.

**Pete Blair** pushed away a collapsed wall panel, freeing a co-worker who had been trapped on the top floor of Office Building 2 (OB2).

**Toni Benham** was on the second floor of the Forum Building in Olympia, and she came away with sore muscles and an unforgettable memory: Watching glass bend.

At **Western State Hospital** in Lakewood, where 2,500 DSHS employees scrambled to rearrange wards after the highest-security building was declared uninhabitable, Assistant Secretary Tim Brown discovered that the extra security officer beside him was really a therapist - just one of hundreds of examples of staff pitching in to prevent injury and further risk.

**Peter Marburger** went over to the Westside of Olympia on foot to recover his car and then came back to the Capitol Campus to give rides home to other DSHS workers who could not reach their cars in the underground parking garage.

A shaken **Lynn Morgan**, walking home after making sure her co-workers were safely out of OB2, stopped to use a garden hose to fight a house fire that had begun

when a shaken chimney caused sparks in the attic.

In Seattle, Native American Community Case-worker **Rosemary Martinez** shielded her client's baby from a falling light fixture that covered her shoulder and arm with bruises but spared the child any injury.

And Mail Operations Administrator **Don Barnes** and his staff did what they do best, earthquake or no earthquake: They got out the mail on time!

### Here are some of their stories:

#### Getting SSPS back on its feet

• Fran Wilson-Maudsley, operations manager, Social Service Payment System (SSPS), had a special problem in the wake of the earthquake. Her computer-

ized payment system was flat on its back, which meant no reimbursement checks would be processed for the thousands of providers and clients who depend on SSPS every day. She and her crew were among the few people allowed back into OB2 for work even before the building was declared structurally sound, because most of the payment runs require human intervention at some point and there was no other way to check the computers and the status of payments.

"We were able to get a message to many of our providers through our telephone system (Invoice Express) contractor in Portland," Wilson-Maudsley said. "Many providers were still submitting their recent claims for payment through that system. One of our Invoice Express operators, located across town in West Olympia, even stayed in a damaged building to answer provider concerns."

A skeleton crew at the Olympia processing center worked hard on Thursday to repair damaged systems and keep others on line. One staff person used his personal telephone and a laptop computer to run some computer jobs from his home so those jobs would not interfere with mission critical processing when more staff could get back into their buildings to work. The skeleton crew in Olympia pro-

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Director Gwen Gua and Program Manager Tiffany Villines (Indian Policy and Support Services) face the challenge of post-earthquake Monday in OB2.



The editor's office

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## With some exceptions, DSHS buildings take the shake with only minor damage

Although it was traumatic for the humans, the DSHS-owned and leased buildings weathered the Nisqually Earthquake very well, with a few exceptions. Damage to DSHS buildings and equipment is estimated at \$9 million, according to Stan Marshburn, budget director. This does not include overtime needed to ensure patients and the public were safe at one of the state mental hospitals.

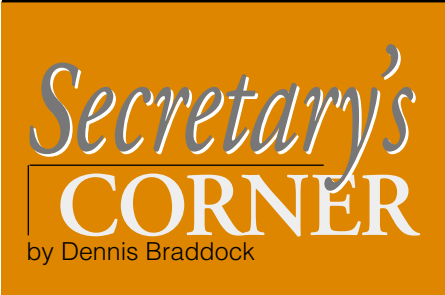
"Of the 23 buildings DSHS owns and manages, which are primarily the institutions, we came through the earthquake very well," said Bob Hubenthal, Capital Programs chief with the Lands and Buildings Division. Western State Hospital

(WSH) had the worst damage, mostly on North Hall, which required the relocation of over 230 patients (see related story "Pitching in to move a small city" on page 2).

Other institutions with less serious impacts were: one of the older buildings at the recently-remodeled Green Hill Training School in Chehalis, Maple Lane School in Ground Mound near Centralia, and Yakima Valley School in Selah.

DSHS headquarters building on the Capitol Campus, Office Building 2, was closed for two

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# Words about our work

Employees, clients, and the public share thoughts on the work we do

Send your thoughts and/or letters from clients to Secretary Dennis Braddock, attention: Letters to *The News Connection*, P.O. Box (Mailstop) 45010, Olympia WA 98504; via e-mail [BraddD@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:BraddD@dshs.wa.gov)



The Nisqually Earthquake gave DSHS management two important messages: One, our staff and systems respond remarkably well to crisis; two, we

need to improve a number of our emergency response procedures. We will be incorporating “lessons learned” from our experience into emergency response procedures.

During those first anxious moments after the quake as OB2 occupants mingled on the lawn next to Capitol Way, we tried to assess damage, safety of clients and staff, and what to do next. The assistant secretaries and I decided to meet the next morning at the Lacey Government Center (LGC) since Lacey reported little damage and their systems were working.

On Thursday, DSHS Cabinet met with building officials to receive damage reports on state-owned as well as leased buildings and get a prognosis for when staff could return to all work sites.

Damage varied across Western Washington, with the most serious problems at Western State Hospital in Lakewood where the Forensic Unit was seriously damaged. Amazingly, no one was injured there and the staff and patients completed a complex set of moves to relocate over 239 patients without any significant incidents.

We continued to meet at the LGC throughout Thursday and Friday to coordinate our efforts and communicate with the field offices. We received reports of heroic efforts throughout the state where staff put clients’ safety ahead of their own. Stories came in of dedicated employees who made sure that critical services and payments to clients proceeded almost uninterrupted. We are sharing just a sampling of those stories throughout this edition of *The NewsConnection*.

For me personally, riding out the quake on the fourth floor of OB2, it was a scary 40 seconds, but I have never been so proud to be associated with DSHS as in the aftermath of this quake. It was impressive to see employees, after being assured their families and fellow workers were safe, immediately begin the work of getting services to clients.

(Editor’s note: Debbie David was a background check processor with the DSHS Background Check Program.)

Dear Debbie,

I am writing to thank you for the effort that you put into getting (name withheld)’s background clearance through its process as soon as it could be done.

During the time that the clearance was being processed, I was commuting a total of three and one half hours a day to be with (name withheld) since Sept. 5, 2000 for State Licensing Requirements. Since

receiving the clearance, my workload has freed me up to do my duties as a child care director.

Thank you again for your effort and working with me on this matter.

Sincerely, **Christine Chang**  
Child Care Director  
Clallam County Family YMCA



# Litigation News

By *Bernie Friedman, J.D.*  
*Special Assistant to the Secretary for Loss Prevention and Risk Management*

Being here in these litigious times can create a false suggestion that DSHS is filled with careless, lackadaisical people who don’t care what happens to their clients. You all know that is not true, but there are reasons why only bad things seem to make the news. Let me describe some of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Several factors make DSHS litigation both unique and especially perilous for the agency.

Because DSHS clients are the most vulnerable members of our society, whenever injury occurs to them there tends to be both sympathy and resulting indignation in

the community. Who is not outraged at the sexual abuse of a child or a developmentally disabled adult, persons who cannot defend themselves against predatory behavior?

Skilled plaintiffs’ lawyers play on these factors in front of juries, and objectively minor injuries explode into enormous verdicts because juries are told they have to “send a message” to deter such future occurrences.

Moreover, although hard to quantify, there is presently an increasing tide of anti-government feeling. The decade of the Nineties saw several mini-tax revolts in

Washington through the initiative process as an expression of that feeling.

Juries know state government is the defendant, and automatically assume there is an infinite amount of money available to pay any judgment they may award. In a private lawsuit, on the other hand, only individuals appear in court and a jury is never permitted to know whether a defendant has insurance.

In a lawsuit between private individuals, if the parties settle the case, they may enter into a confidentiality agreement to keep the terms of the settlement from the general public. Doing so protects defendants from possible future lawsuits by others who may have suffered similar injuries.

DSHS cannot enter into such agreements because of the Public Disclosure Act and because of public policy considerations affecting a public agency.

Plaintiffs’ lawyers have skillfully used the media to trumpet their successes and berate DSHS. The news media are attracted to stories with sensational aspects. Unlike a private sector party, DSHS cannot respond in kind. It would be unseemly and inappropriate for the agency to issue a press release celebrating a defense verdict in a wrongful adoption case or a sexual molestation case. Thus, the public perception of DSHS is skewed because the public typically hears only one side of a story.

In summary, a public agency like DSHS simply does not have all the arrows in its defense quiver a private sector company has. Understanding that makes the adverse media reports easier to put up with.

Contact me at (360) 902-7860 or e-mail at [freidbh@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:freidbh@dshs.wa.gov) to discuss loss prevention and risk management.

## Where employees can go for the latest information in an emergency

Immediately after the Nisqually Earthquake, as buildings were still being inspected for damage, many displaced employees were confused about when they could return to their work sites. Employee information was posted on the DSHS Web site Thursday morning.

In the event of other emergencies where employees are concerned about returning to work, they should look to the DSHS Internet home page at <http://www.was.gov/dshs> to learn the latest information.

Since there can be a delay in posting of this information while staff wait to be cleared to access computers, efforts are also underway to establish a single phone number with current information. That number will be publicized as soon as it is in place.

## DSHS buildings roll with the punches

(Continued from page 1)

days while structural engineers from General Administration assessed potential damage to the building. None was found and after minor repairs staff returned to work Monday.

Most local DSHS offices are located in buildings that are leased from private owners. With the exception of Belltown Community Services Office (CSO) and the Division of Child Support’s Pioneer Square office, both in downtown Seattle, and the Puyallup CSO, all weathered the shake with no structural damage, ac-

cording to Dave Carrell, Facilities Management and Design Unit supervisor. These offices, while structurally sound, required minor repairs, such as to water systems. Staff were displaced from the headquarters buildings for Medical Assistance Administration, known as Town Square, while sprinklers were repaired.

“Our buildings performed very well and we had excellent responses from our landlords,” Carroll said. “The owners responded immediately and quickly brought in engineers and cleanup crews.”

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*The mission of DSHS is to improve the quality of life for individuals and families in need. We will help people achieve safe, self-sufficient, healthy and secure lives.*



## Nisqually Earthquake

# Although rattled, DSHS staff put clients first

(Continued from page 1)

cessed SSPS claims that night, and DSHS mailroom staff in Tumwater worked at warp speed to make sure service provider checks were in the mail the next day.

"Our actions were out of concern for the people we serve; but as is often true when we reach out to help others, I received my own rewards," Wilson-Maudsley wrote later. "The feelings of helplessness from when I huddled under my desk as the earth moved, were replaced by a sense of security as I worked to gain control of my world."

### Saving a child

When the Nisqually Earthquake shook ceiling tiles and light fixtures loose at the Belltown Community Service Office in downtown Seattle, a DSHS caseworker helped avoid tragedy by shielding a client's infant from falling debris.

The incident began in Native American Community Outreach Caseworker Rosemary Martinez' office, where she was interviewing the baby's mother about a job training program. When the quake struck, she wound up holding the baby as they moved onto a stairwell.

"I heard a loud noise and looked up to see this big light fixture falling," said Rosemary Martinez, a caseworker at the office. "I just had time to bend down, and luckily my hand and arm were over the baby. At the hospital later, they said it probably would have caused very serious injuries, at least, if it had hit him."

The baby was pronounced in good health, but Martinez did not fare so well herself. Co-workers took her to the hospital later, and she was treated for massive bruising on her hand, forearm, elbow and shoulder where the fixture bounced down on her.

The ceiling tiles and other damage were repaired on Thursday and Friday, while clients and staff moved their opera-



Disability Manager Dave Brown perseveres in spite of losing an office wall in OB2

tions to the nearby DSHS regional headquarters. The Belltown facility reopened on Monday.

### The mail must go through

The DSHS mail operations staff did not let the earthquake keep them from their appointed rounds. As one staffer described it later, the earthquake was simply a "nonevent" when it came to DSHS mail.

Led by Don Barnes, Mail Operations administrator, the staff got all mail out of the OB2 mailroom on that traumatic Wednesday. The next day, DSHS coordi-

nated with the U.S. Postal Service to track down warrants that had been "lost" in the post office during the confusion. Then Barnes and his staff moved mail service headquarters to the Blake Office Park facility in Lacey until space in OB2 was available and secure.



Lynn Morgan's desk on the fourth floor of OB-2

Throughout the period, the Insert Section in Tumwater continued to process various notices and warrants for both clients and vendors.

"We were justifiably proud of this display of exceptional dedication to customer services witnessed during the last few days," Barnes said.

### Everything was coming up ACES

Like everyone else in state government, the ACES staff was shaken by the earthquake. But by 7 a.m. the morning after, emergency staff were on the job to start cleaning up, restoring ACES (Automated Client Eligibility System) as quickly as possible, and troubleshooting input of ACES data via aces.online. The ACES Help Desk was fully staffed and provided a link between offices across the state as well as in Olympia. The desk received more than 400 calls - with questions ranging from how to reset a password to whether the Capitol was still standing!

Initially the primary system was not available because the building with the mainframe had not been cleared for re-entry. Despite that, critical tasks were still performed on Thursday as possible, and because of the advance work, the full system was available to users again by 4:15 p.m. on Thursday.

### The day the walls came down

Pete Blair kept his head, and walked calmly back to his Mental Health cubicle on the fourth floor of OB2 to get his vest and his car keys after the intense shaking subsided. It was a lucky move. On the way, he found another staffer trapped by an inner wall that had shaken loose and fallen across his passageway. "He wasn't hurt," Blair said. "It was just that he could only pull at it, and it was the wrong way. He needed a push from the other side."

So Blair pushed, and the wall fell away, and both men evacuated the building. Because the trapped man worked odd shifts, Blair said most people on the floor would not have realized he was around. "It was lucky I was there," he said.

On the ground, Blair and a buddy, Peter Marburger, hooked up and decided to walk to the west side to Marburger's home. They picked up his car and came back to Capitol Campus, spending the afternoon taking home other staffers whose cars could not be reached in the underground parking garage.

Another fourth-floor OB2 denizen was **Lynn Morgan** in the Publications office. After making sure her co-workers were safely out of the building, she immediately set out for home, hoping the walk would settle her jangled nerves. But the walk home was not a quiet one. En route, she found a home starting to burn from embers shaken out of a cracked chimney, so she picked up a garden hose to help fight the blaze. (Sadly, despite Morgan's help, the fire resulted in major damage, because the owners were unable to get through to the Fire Department by telephone and had to drive to the station to turn in the alarm.)

### After the quake, back to the interview

Lake City CSO Case Manager Sue Harrower was up to the harrowing experience that Wednesday. She had just begun to interview a lady with a toddler when the quake struck, rattling the office. Harrower, thinking quickly, helped the client and the child crawl under her desk. Then, rather than seek shelter for herself, she sat down beside the desk and helped hold the toddler in position, soothing the child with calm words.

"When the earthquake was over, the lady had calmed down, and Sue continued with the interview," reported Gail Giraladin, an admiring co-worker.

### Making sure the headquarters buildings are safe

In the aftermath of the earthquake, Judy Johnson, OB2 building manager, seemed to everywhere in and around OB2 insuring that people were authorized to be in the building and were safe. She coordinated with Rich Reeder and others from General Administration to get the building assessed for structural integrity and lesser damage. Beyond that, Johnson arranged for the worst of the damage, collapsed walls, etc., to be cleaned up before staff returned to work the following Monday.

In addition to all of this, she coordinated the efforts of her staff to insure the Blake Office Park and Woodland Square facilities were safe and operable for staff at those locations. She truly made extraordinary efforts to minimize the impacts of this traumatic event on the staff of the department.

### Ensuring the Citibank payments are made on time

The day after the Nisqually Earthquake uprooted much of DSHS headquarters staff, Don Ahmuty arrived at Blake Office Building in Lacey as normal. He was told to go home and call in every two hours for an update on when the building would be open after inspection. Ahmuty, with the Finance Division, knew that payments

were due to Citibank for the Electronic Benefits Transfer program. He understood the basic process making the payments. It probably would have been acceptable by Citibank to miss this day and incorporate the payment into the following day's business, but the state might have had to pay a penalty and interest on the funds.

Although it had been a year and half since Ahmuty performed the task of preparing the spreadsheets that produced the necessary results, he remembered enough to complete the paperwork. He then obtained the federal draw of funds and delivered the required documents to the temporary office of the State Treasurer, which was located in a hotel in downtown Olympia.

Because of Ahmuty, Citibank received their funds only two hours late.

### Keeping the technology running

The Information System Services Division (ISSD) staff began checking the status of the technology infrastructure as soon as staff arrived at remote sites or were allowed back into OB2. The Wide Area Network (WAN) remained up during and after the earthquake, allowing all the



Deschutes Parkway along Capitol Lake suffers damage

local area networks used by DSHS to connect with each other and the Internet.

Telephone and telecommunication systems, such as voice mail, stayed operational during and after the quake. Exchange and GroupWise e-mail systems were available by 4 p.m. on Thursday. Help Desk staff returned to the building as soon as limited entry was allowed on Wednesday to respond to emergency calls and set messages on the Help Desk line. Customer service staff also monitored and responded to calls from remote locations. Good disaster recovery planning and execution clearly paid off.

### Staff make sure child support goes out

Although the Division of Child Support's headquarters building was closed the day after the earthquake, several managers manually processed over 1,700 payments totaling approximately \$280,000. Staff responsible for the Support Enforcement Management System reformatted data and got the system running by the end of the day. A management staff member served as a member of the state's public information response team and DSHS liaison at the Washington Emergency Operations Center in Camp Murray.

On Friday, staff worked extra hours to catch up with payments and even worked an emergency shift on Saturday. Approximately 36,000 payments were processed totaling \$8 million.

Nisqually Earthquake

DSHS staff and the earthquake – in their own words

Wayne Vrona

Adult Family Home Licensor, Region 6B

I had just arrived at an adult family home in Sequim to do an initial inspection prior to issuing a license as a change in ownership. I was sitting at the table with one of the providers going over paperwork. The other provider and caregiver were in the kitchen preparing lunch to serve for the residents.

It soon became obvious to myself and the provider sitting with me that we were having an earthquake, however those in the kitchen were not aware, due to the level of activity and a dishwasher running.

I called to them that we were having an earthquake and the provider at the table with me proceeded to initiate the evacuation. (This was the prudent course of action because the house had many large windows, and the outside of the house was wide open and safer then in the house)

After the quake, the provider and caregiver in the kitchen confessed to me that they thought I was running an evacuation drill as part of the initial licensing visit to determine their abilities at evacuation. The provider said it was only after she saw me wheeling out a resident - and then realized the floor was moving - that she understood it was real.

Needless to say, they did a marvelous evacuation and checked the house for safety after the quake and all in under four minutes (why I even thought to check my watch is a mystery to me!)

Hattie Carlson

Division of Developmental Disabilities  
Second floor of OB2, Olympia

I jumped under my desk ASAP and found my face in the middle of a tornado of wires! Not wanting sparks to fly in my face, I turned off the power strip, but for some reason, started feverishly unplugging every wire in site. I guess I was trying to kill the monster! It was a good thing I heard someone yelling, “Evacuate the building” or I would have stayed there unconsciously battling all those wires even after the shaking stopped.

Toni Benham

Forms and Records Management

I was in training at the Forum Building on 11th Street (Olympia). That is a two story building built on pillars over a parking area. I was on the second floor with lots of windows. How that building remained standing is a wonder to me.

I was under the table and hanging on for life. Every muscle in my legs hurt for days because I was so tense. Also, did you know that glass would bend? That is exactly what those windows were doing.

One thing for sure, there is a God. To go through that and not have fatalities is remarkable. When it was over all I wanted to do was go home and find my family members. I wanted to know they were still

with me. My daughter was in a delivery van sitting on a bridge in Everett. My son was looking at someone’s sliding glass door, he was standing on a deck overlooking a 100 foot ravine. ... My husband was driving a truck through a parking lot and thought he had a flat tire. All he could say was “It wasn’t that bad”...until he got home and saw the news. His story changed in a hurry.

Barbara Lantz

Medical Assistance Administration  
Town Square, Olympia

I work in Quality Management, Division of Health Services Quality Support. We were having a staff meeting in the West Conference Room (Plum Street - Building 6, 4th Floor, Olympia).

One of our staff who is outstationed, Edith Lawrence, was on the conference line. When the earthquake started, our supervisor, Alice Lind said, “We’re having an earthquake Edith, we’re going to have to hang up now.” This comment struck me as quite funny at the time - but if you know Alice, quite in keeping with her demeanor.

I immediately went under the table (a good strong table in that West Conference Room!) and everyone else headed for the door. I yelled at them to get under the table and they all turned around (it all seemed in slow motion) and got under either the large conference room table or two other tables located against the walls.

The shaking and building “groan-



ing” was horrific, but the worst for me was seeing water running down the inside of the conference room wall during the middle of the earthquake. I became more worried.

The shaking stopped (finally) and we ran out the door. I remember stepping around a file cabinet and seeing insulation on a desk. We ran under the leaking pipe (and all got wet) to reach our exit. I was so grateful to be out of the building and safe.

There were a number of shocky people in the parking lot, but everyone just pulled together and supported each other, all thankful that injuries were mostly minor.

Dr. Nancy Anderson

Medical Assistance Administration

Last Wednesday morning (Feb. 28) at a quarter to eleven, I was annoyed. I had just found out that I was going to a meeting in Kent unexpectedly, and I knew I’d be on the freeway at 5 p.m. and I’d be miserable.

I debated calling my husband so he would know he had to pick up the kids at 5:30 p.m., and I was somewhat satisfied that I’d spread my annoyance to him. These thoughts filled me up. I knew they were important, had weight in the world.

Ten minutes later I was crouched under my desk, watching my office fall apart, my plants overturn, my file cabinets fall sideways. I don’t remember the quake like a continuous event, or a movie, more like a series of flashes or photographs:



Click: The window rattles; my plants shake; this is an earthquake. I take a dive under my desk.  
Click: The noise, a low groan, a rumble, a roar, my papers fly, my plants fall over.  
Click: My file cabinets, the big ones that I can never move by myself, also take a dive; I’m calling out everyone’s name who works near me; my kids; I’m thinking about my two girls.  
Click: All noise stops, and then the sirens start; I scramble out the door of my office. Phyllis is at her door: Are you OK? Are you OK? There is a hug. My kids. I have to make sure my kids are OK.  
Click: I’m walking real fast and it’s a mess; papers, files, and water falling (why is water falling?). The ceiling tiles are on the floor (what is the ceiling doing on the floor?) Shelley and I hold hands leaving.  
Click: The stairs and out, everyone looks gray; but it’s sunny outside and even warm. Everyone is fine....I keep saying we’re so lucky, we’re so lucky.  
Click: I’m gone fast to find my kids. I try to find the emergency broadcasting system on the radio, but it must have been a figment of my childhood imagination. KPLU just keeps playing jazz—I guess they figure if you have to go, go listening to the jazz greats...I keep thinking...I don’t care if the whole house falls down, just my kids, OK? Just my kids.  
Click: Green field outside the kids’ school; my husband bicycles up to me, to us; my kids are smiling;I am thinking: The earth is big and heartless everywhere. We are so small. Anything can happen anywhere. The thought of my children fills my mind, and has weight.

Safety – what you can do about it

An unwelcome feature of earthquakes is the sense of powerlessness people are left with.

While we cannot control earthquakes, we can take some measures that will hopefully keep us, our co-workers and our families safer when the earth shakes.

Each office unit is required to have a safety committee and a safety plan, according to Cheri Greenwood, Office of Risk Management chief. If you don’t know your safety plan, then contact your safety officer or your supervisor.

An agency Safety Manual is available as a guide for offices as they develop a plan unique to their needs, according to John Nacht, Safety and Claims manager. That and other information regarding disaster planning and damage reporting is available at the Office of Risk Management’s Intranet Web site: <http://intra.dshs.wa.gov/esd/orm>. Nacht encourages all offices to review and update their plans now while the memory of the Nisqually Earthquake is still fresh.

The following are tips from the Tacoma/Pierce Chapter of the American Red Cross on how to prepare for emergencies.

Know What to Do When the Shaking Begins

- DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON! Move only a few steps to a nearby safe place.
- Stay indoors until the shaking stops.
- Stay away from windows.
- If you are outdoors, find a clear spot.
- Drop to the ground and cover your neck and head.

- If you are in a car, slow down and drive to a clear place. Stay in the car until the shaking stops.

Identify What to Do After the Shaking Stops

- Check yourself for injuries.
- Check others for injuries. Give first aid. Use the telephone only to report life-threatening emergencies.
- Stay calm and prepare for more “aftershocks.” Each time you feel one, DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON!
- Eliminate fire hazards. Turn off the gas if you smell gas or think it’s leaking.
- Inspect your home for damage.
- Go to your pre-designated safe site and take your disaster supplies kit.
- Listen to the radio for instructions.

Prepare a Family Disaster & Earthquake Plan

- Prepare and practice your disaster plan. Where will each person go to be safe?
- Examine hazards in your home, workplace, and school. Strap your water heater to wall studs and install strong latches on cupboards.
- Purchase or assemble a first aid kit and disaster supplies kit for your home, office, school, and cars. The American Red Cross has disaster supplies kits available for purchase.
- Know how and where to shut off your utilities, and have the proper tools on hand.
- Choose a safe family meeting spot outside away from the house, trees, and power lines to meet after the shaking has stopped.

- Choose an out-of-town family contact because local lines may become overloaded.
- Practice DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON at least twice a year. If there’s no table or desk nearby, sit on the floor against an interior wall away from windows, bookcases, or tall furniture that could fall on you.
- Learn Red Cross first aid and CPR.
- Inform babysitters and caregivers of your plan.

Prepare a Disaster Supplies Kit

- Have a disaster supplies kit prepared for your home, car, office, and for your children at school. Items you should include in your kit:
- First aid kit and essential medications.
- Canned food and a can opener.
- Minimum of three gallons of water per person in your family.
- Protective clothing, rainwear, and bedding or sleeping bags.
- Battery-powered radio, flashlights, and extra batteries.
- Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.
- Written instructions for how to turn off the gas, electricity, and water if authorities advise you to do so. (Remember, you will need a professional to turn natural gas back on).
- Keep essentials, such as a flashlight and sturdy shoes by your bedside.

Quality in DSHS will return next month



# Nisqually Earthquake

## Western State Hospital pitches in to move a “small city”

When the Nisqually Earthquake shook holes in the walls of the most secure building on the grounds of Western State Hospital in Lakewood, it set off a carefully orchestrated series of transfers to shift patients and staff around the grounds to recreate secure wards for those high-risk patients.

The hospital first evacuated all 2,500 of its staff and patients from all the wards on campus on Wednesday in the immediate aftermath of the quake, and then returned patients to the undamaged buildings. Hospital spokeswoman Kris Flowers said monthly emergency drills at the hospital kept the exercise orderly and smooth, despite the stress and pressure of the quake.



Staff and patients await building inspections at Western State Hospital

But North Hall, which housed the hospital's 239 highest-risk patients in secure wards, was shaken so badly that structural engineers declared the building unsafe. About 30 patients in the Admissions Ward - housing those patients facing criminal charges who are sent to the hospital by police and courts for evaluation - were moved immediately to a secure ward on the eastern side of the grounds. The remaining patients from North Hall spent the night in a hospital gymnasium under heavy security.

On Thursday, hospital staffers began clearing wards in South Hall, finding new homes for those patients, upgrading the security in South Hall, and then finally moving the North Hall patients from the gymnasium to their new wards.

Assistant Secretary Tim Brown visited the hospital on the day after the earthquake and came away impressed, especially by staffers who pitched in where they were needed. Some staffers helped provide an extra measure of security. Others helped carry furniture and personal belongings with transferring patients. He told of one woman hurrying through the raindrops when she tipped an overloaded cart onto a sidewalk.

“People materialized from all over, helping out, picking things up, and getting them inside,” Brown told the Cabinet during its emergency briefings in Lacey. “But it was just one example in an incredible day, with everyone working hard together to get things squared away.”

“The staff has been incredible under very trying circumstances, and the Lakewood police have been just great,” Flowers said. “In effect, they moved a small city of 2,500 people on and off their wards, and not just once, but twice.”

Flowers said the hospital was grateful for all the help rendered by the City of

Lakewood after the quake. Firefighters and police units were at the hospital almost immediately to help with safety and security, and structural engineers and inspectors from the city conducted building inspections across the campus quickly afterwards.

Employees and patients have begun sharing hundreds of “hero” stories.

- A nursing supervisor, who was on the fourth floor of North Hall during the quake, said she will never forget the picture in her mind of the fear experienced by everyone on that ward. She noted how in the midst of chaos and fear, residents and staff formed one unified group to bring everyone to safety after the building stopped shaking. Reluctant to single out any individual act of heroism, because in her words, “they are all heroes,” she told of residents (many of whom were not yet stable on their medications) who took care of each other, tucking others in blankets, sharing hats when there weren’t enough to go around, sharing sandwiches, and consoling one another by saying, “Don’t worry, staff will take care of us.”

- Many staff re-entered the building, wading through pouring water from broken water mains, up four flights of stairs to get more blankets, hats and medications for those residents who needed them. To sum it up she said, “It is a miracle that no one was hurt — angels came and wrapped their arms around this old building and held it up.”

- Maintenance workers became caregivers, pushing geriatric residents to safety.



- Residents assisted staff with blanket and food distribution.

- Carliss Crowley, office manager, and her teenage daughter (who came to be with her mother immediately after the quake) went to the laundry and brought out blankets and began distributing them amongst the evacuees, then assisted geriatric residents to safety.

- Chylynn Hansel and Marie Pike, Custodial Department clerical staff, did not hesitate before lending assistance with the evacuation of the North Hall residents.

- Payroll Department employees dug in and assisted in clearing and cleaning wards for re-occupancy.

- Mike Bravo, on light duty, manned the satellite phone for hours and assisted Telvie Harris and Louise Bluhm, claims specialists, in examining buildings for damage immediately after the quake. Telvie and Louise spent hours at the hub of information gathering at the WSH Command Center, and during the late night hours of emergency shuffling of wards and residents, they rolled up their sleeves and assisted custodial staff in quickly preparing a ward for residents.

- The WSH Switchboard staff immediately went into disaster mode, and did not let up until the crisis was over; then was faced with relocating over 300 phones.

- When Irv Warner, facilities manager, was commended for his huge contribution to the success of the record setting mass relocation of wards, he quietly nodded and gave all credit to his hard-working staff.

- Vicki Carter and Rich Skewis, Developmental Disabilities (DD) Vocational Unit employees, traveled immediately after the quake to community worksites to ensure that all DD clients from the vocational training program were safe. They were all accounted for within minutes and were immediately brought back and provided lunches that were retrieved from within the building.

- Child Study & Treatment Center assisted WSH food service people by sending over hundreds of sandwiches and snack items so patients did not miss lunch while they were still evacuated from the buildings.

- In all, 23 wards were relocated — over 590 patients.

“The Maintenance Department, Custodial Staff, Motor Pool, Security Department, Food Service and most of all ward staff who gave this entire effort their all deserve special acknowledgement,” said Flowers.

The earthquake in its own powerful way equalized residents, ward staff, managers, maintenance workers, custodians, dietitians, clerical staff, engineers, doctors, nurses and social workers, into hard-working teams of dedicated men and women who managed the impossible within 48 hours.

“Enough cannot be said about the amazing work and dedication of all the WSH employees during the earthquake, and especially during the aftermath,” said Flowers. “They are truly the epitome of caregivers as they managed to keep over 1,000 mentally-ill residents safe and secure throughout the February 28th disaster.”

## Health care information systems changing under HIPAA

**W**hat if the special computer codes on your bank's checks were only good at the supermarket? Say you couldn't use those checks at the department store or the gas station because those businesses used different kinds of computers and couldn't read the coded numbers on them?

This is exactly the problem we face with our health care information system. Nationally, we have more than 400 different ways of formatting and coding health care transactions. Providers, health plans, and huge government payer systems like Medicaid and Medicare are not compatible with one another, and have enormous trouble reading and exchanging each other's codes and formats. About 26 cents of every health care dollar goes into administrative costs, not health care.

That's why big change is coming to the way DSHS handles health care. At the center is a five-year-old federal law called HIPAA - for the “Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.”

Beginning late last year, DSHS launched a major effort to implement provisions of the law. It will put all of the health care information systems on the same footing and have them operate under the same set of rules. The effort moved to all DSHS administrations early this year, since the changes will ultimately affect every DSHS division and program that bills or pays claims for any kind of health care services.

The first of those changes will deal with the transaction codes and formats used to bill, file claims, and determine eligibility.

In addition, other federal rules will:

- Standardize privacy guarantees for personal health information
- Make sure health care information systems are secure from intrusion or inadvertent disclosure.

HIPAA's changes extend beyond government; private plans and providers will also participate. Many doctors, hospitals, and insurance carriers are already doing the same kind of assessments we are. Most analysts say the changeover will take between two and four years, with the major transaction changes due to be completed by the first deadline: October 2002.

Early this month, DSHS administrations were given the job of assessing their need to comply with the federal law.

The most important thing to remember is that the DSHS changes will have enormous impact on improving our clients' lives in relationship to health care coverage. They will let Medicaid and other payer systems quickly establish eligibility for services, and let us make that kind of information available to providers and clients quickly and efficiently.

The changes will mean we can handle payer information in different ways - treating “spend-downs” as easily as deductibles, say, or providing easy ways for clients to transfer from one doctor to another without worrying about billing mistakes. They also will underscore the privacy of personal medical information, and relieve fears that hackers or insurance companies will unfairly invade the databanks.

These are real benefits and measure real improvement in people's lives - just like all of us who don't have to reach for a different checkbook every time we walk into a new store.